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SUBJECT: DUP NEGOTIATES ALLIANCE WITH NCP

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Poloffs spoke April 3 with Tag El-Sir Mohammed Salih, Deputy Secretary General of the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) Mirghani faction. Salih confirmed that elderly DUP leader Mohammed Osman Al-Mirghani will soon return to Khartoum from Cairo despite alleged threats against him by members of some armed groups. The party realizes it cannot compete in elections on its own, so it is negotiating an alliance with the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Salih claimed that democratization under the Cairo Agreement of June 18, 2005 had achieved progress in the country, pointing out that freedom of speech and assembly are now a fact of life. End Summary.

Al-Mirghani to return soon despite threats

¶2. (SBU) Speaking to Poloffs in his downtown Khartoum offices, Salih said that DUP party leader Al-Mirghani would soon be returning to Khartoum. (Note: The DUP's original Mirghani faction, one of five factions due to splintering, has been saying that Al-Mirghani would be returning "soon" for the last six months. End note.) Salih said the only impediment to Al-Mirghani's return is rehabilitation of his residence and offices, which had been confiscated by "the regime" and turned into a hospital. Asked to comment on news reports that elements of Al-Fatah Forces, an armed movement associated with the DUP, had threatened al-Mirghani should he return (charging that the leader had "sold out" to the NCP), Salih confirmed that threats had been made, but described them as a "propaganda bubble" and told poloffs the party will take legal action against those making the threats.

¶3. (SBU) While the party is concerned about their leader's safety, Salih said the DUP had arranged Al-Mirghani's return with the NCP regime. He said Al-Mirghani's son just returned to Khartoum last week without any problems.

Election Strategy: Alliance with ruling NCP

¶4. (SBU) When asked what the DUP's election strategy would be, and whether there was truth to reports that the party wants an alliance with the NCP, Salih said his party realizes it could not hope to compete on its own since the NCP controls all the resources. For that reason, the party is negotiating with the NCP regarding the terms of an alliance in preparation for the 2009 elections. (NOTE: In an earlier meeting, Salih told Poloff that the party tries to keep talks going with all the major political parties. End note.)

¶5. (SBU) On a related issue, we asked Salih about the recent defection from the party and to the NCP of several wealthy backers (reported in REFTEL). He replied that it is understandable that business leaders need access to the halls of power to protect their own interests, such as helping with customs problems. However, he denied that the departure of the backers had caused any further financial hardship for the DUP. The party was in tight financial straits before the defections, so the situation had not improved and

is not any worse as a result.

Democratization is here now

¶6. (SBU) Salih claimed proudly that the provisions of the Cairo Agreement signed between the NCP and the DUP on June 18, 2005 - with provisions relating to democratization and political freedoms - had born fruit for all of Sudan's people. He said the Sudanese people and the media are now free to criticize the government, even to the point of calling for the end of the regime. Political parties are free to meet, and do so regularly, in cities and towns throughout the country.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: The picture of the DUP (Al-Mirghani faction) conveyed by Salih is of a political force unsure of its own continued reason for being, a party that no longer plays a significant role as political opposition. One faction of the party currently participates in the Government of National Unity. The original DUP faction is slowly being weakened by defections to the ruling NCP (to say nothing of party schisms) even as the party negotiates an election alliance with the NCP - because that's where the money is. To a great extent, this lack of vigor and leadership is the result of Al-Mirghani waiting endlessly in the wings in Cairo. The DUP is essentially a spent force at this point, only worth watching in the context of pre-election alliances.

FERNANDEZ